



2012/2013

COUNTRY GUIDELINES FOR  
AMERICAN FULBRIGHT SCHOLARS AND STUDENTS

Kyrgyz Republic

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## INTRODUCTION

The Fulbright Program is sponsored and administered by the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) of the United States Department of State. Overseas, Fulbright programs are the responsibility of the Public Affairs Section (PAS) of the U.S. Embassy.

This country guideline contains **summary** information about the Fulbright award, logistical and program support provided through Department of State Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA), contact information for the Public Affairs Section (PAS) and/or the U.S. Embassy, and advisory information about Kyrgyz Republic.

### The Fulbright Grant: A Bi-national Program

The Fulbright Program is administered in accordance with regulations established by the J. William Fulbright Foreign Scholarship Board (FSB). The Board has ruled that Fulbright grant funds cannot duplicate benefits received under other auspices. Therefore, grantees that receive host government or host institution financial contributions (for example, international travel, per diem/subsistence/housing allowance) in cash or kind do not receive allowances for these benefits in their grants. Grantees who receive a concurrent grant to the same country under other auspices may have their Fulbright grants reduced if Fulbright grant benefits are duplicated by the other grant.

### What the Grant Provides

**Fulbright Student Grants** have two components: [1] a Base Amount and [2] Monthly Maintenance. Additional funds may be included in your grant as allowances and are described separately. Grant benefits authorized by ECA are paid in U.S. dollars through the Institute of International Education (IIE).

1. **BASE AMOUNT** is provided to cover initial or one-time start-up expenses such as:
  - **Round-trip economy airfare:** The Fulbright student is responsible for making travel arrangements according to the Fly America Act and securing tickets.
  - **Unaccompanied and/or excess baggage**
  - **Miscellaneous Costs** such as visa fees, permits, medical exams, immunizations, etc. This is a fixed sum in each grant and might not reimburse all expenses completely.
2. **MONTHLY MAINTENANCE** allowance is provided monthly to cover recurring subsistence needs such as housing, fuel, utilities, and food. The maintenance allowance is based on the estimated cost of maintaining a modest standard of living in the country of assignment.

**Fulbright Senior Scholar Grants** have three components: [1] Travel and Relocation, [2] Monthly Maintenance, and [3] a Monthly Stipend. Additional funds may be included in your

grant as special allowances and are described separately. Grant benefits are based on the estimated cost of maintaining a modest standard of living in the country of assignment. Benefits are not intended to duplicate U.S. salary levels or the standard of living of U.S. diplomatic personnel. Grant benefits authorized by ECA are paid in U.S. dollars through the Council for International Exchange of Scholars (CIES).

#### 1. **TRAVEL AND RELOCATION**

- **Round-trip economy airfare:** The Fulbright scholar is responsible for making travel arrangements according to the Fly America Act, and securing tickets.
- **Unaccompanied and/or excess baggage**
- **Miscellaneous Costs** such as visa fees, permits, medical exams, immunizations, etc. This is a fixed sum in each grant and might not reimburse all expenses completely.

2. **MONTHLY MAINTENANCE** allowance is provided monthly to cover recurring subsistence needs such as housing, fuel, utilities, and food. The maintenance allowance is based on the estimated cost of maintaining a modest standard of living in the country of assignment.

#### 3. **MONTHLY BASE STIPEND**

### **PRACTICAL MATTERS**

The Fulbright Program is managed by the Public Affairs Section (PAS) of the Embassy of the United States of America in Bishkek, Kyrgyz Republic. As a Fulbright grantee you are required to keep the PAS informed of your whereabouts, should you leave your host institution for an extended period of time, or if you intend on leaving the country, so that you may be reached in the event of emergencies.

#### **Contact: U.S. Embassy in Bishkek**

Embassy Bishkek congratulates you on your scholarship and extends a warm welcome to the Kyrgyz Republic. We hope your stay here will be both rewarding and challenging. To assist you in preparation of your stay in the Kyrgyz Republic, we offer the following information.

#### *Contact*

American Embassy Bishkek  
171 Prospekt Mira  
Bishkek, Kyrgyz Republic 720016  
Telephone: +996-312 - 551241  
<http://bishkek.usembassy.gov>

*For Inquiries with PAS:*

Johanna Fernando  
Cultural Affairs Officer  
E-mail: [FernandoJL@state.gov](mailto:FernandoJL@state.gov)

Guljan Tolbaeva  
Cultural Affairs Assistant  
E-mail: [TolbaevaGK@state.gov](mailto:TolbaevaGK@state.gov)

**American Citizen Services** is located in the Consular Section of the U.S. Embassy. Drop-in hours are Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, 09:00 – 12:00 and 14:00 – 16:00.

After-hours emergency: (0555) 777 267

The most recent Public Announcement on travel in the Kyrgyz Republic can be found on the Department of State website at <http://travel.state.gov> or Embassy Bishkek's public website <http://bishkek.usembassy.gov>.

### **Flights: Fly America**

You **MUST** comply with Fly America regulations. Please note that all flights into Bishkek are early morning arrivals and require two days of travel from the United States. The following are possible routes that keep to Fly America regulations:

- United Airlines via London and out of London via British Midland International to Bishkek
- United Airlines via Frankfurt and out of Frankfurt daily into Istanbul and out of Istanbul daily on Turkish Airlines to Bishkek
- Delta Airlines via Istanbul and out of Istanbul on Turkish Airlines to Bishkek

Be sure to check for any changes in schedules and alternate routes. These schedules vary seasonally. **Important:** We recommend that you check the restrictions and luggage limitations on the connecting flight to your final destination. Turkish Airlines often has different luggage limitations than American carriers.

### **Visas**

A Kyrgyz visa (one-month business visa) can be obtained at the Manas airport in Bishkek on arrival. HR staff at the U.S. Embassy will assist in extending the visa for the grant period within one month of arrival. Alternatively, a visa can be obtained at the Kyrgyz Embassy in Washington, DC for the grant period. Fulbright grantees are issued accreditation cards within three weeks of arrival to the Kyrgyz Republic.

*Contact the Kyrgyz Embassy to the United States*

Embassy of Kyrgyzstan/посольство КР в США

1732 Wisconsin Avenue, NW

Washington, DC 20007

Telephone: (202) 338-5141; (202) 449-9822

Fax: (202) 338-5139

[www.kgembassy.org/index.php/consular](http://www.kgembassy.org/index.php/consular)

### **Pick-up/Drop-off**

Manas airport is about 30 km from Bishkek and has modern facilities with inexpensive taxi services to the city center (\$10-15). Host institutions are responsible for arranging an airport pick-up/drop-off.

### **Diplomatic Pouch**

Fulbright grantees are authorized to use special diplomatic mail couriers (the diplomatic pouch) to make a one-time shipment of four boxes of educational materials to the U.S. Embassy in Bishkek. Each box **must weigh no more than 50 pounds** and **must not exceed 17 x 18 x 32 inches** in dimension. Boxes not securely wrapped or not conforming to weight/size requirements will be returned. It will be the responsibility of the Fulbright grantee to pick up the boxes or cover the cost of onward shipping of boxes.

Address these packages to:

**Cultural Affairs Officer**

**Department of State**

**7040 Bishkek PL**

**Washington DC 20521-7040**

Remember to put your name and return U.S. address in the upper left corner.

### **Health Care**

Modern, American style health care is not available in Kyrgyzstan. The health care system is based on the Soviet style of health care which is different in comparison to Western countries. Generally, medical personnel are knowledgeable but the system lacks the modern health care technology. There are very limited numbers of medical staff that speak English or that were trained in Western Europe or the United States.

If traveling throughout the country for extended period of time, please check the CDC website ([www.cdc.gov/travel](http://www.cdc.gov/travel)) for immunization recommendations, and obtain the immunizations **before** traveling to Kyrgyzstan. People are advised to bring their own medical supplies and medications for any chronic illness, minor illnesses, and injuries. Modern medicines commonly used in the

United States are not available. Insulin is one of many types of medications not available here. Kyrgyzstan is considered a tuberculosis-endemic area and an appropriate test for exposure to tuberculosis needs to be obtained upon returning to the United States.

For major illness or injuries, the normal practice is to get emergency treatment at local facilities and arrange for medical evacuation as soon as possible. Adequate medical evacuation insurance coverage for all travelers is a high priority. In the event of a serious medical condition, every effort should be made to evacuate to Istanbul or Western Europe. Please be advised that the cost of a medical evacuation to Istanbul or Western Europe can easily exceed \$40,000 and may take 12 to 48 hours to arrange.

Embassy Bishkek maintains the following list of clinics and hospitals in Bishkek. Some are private clinics and others are part of the National Health System. All will require a cash payment for care rendered (usually in local currency).

**The U.S. Embassy assumes no responsibility for the professional ability or reputation of the persons or medical facilities whose names appear on this list.**

#### *AMBULANCE*

Bishkek City Ambulance

- Dial 103

Commercial Ambulance Services

- Dial 139, 548666 or 549999
- Dial 151 or 439151

Generally the ambulances in Kyrgyzstan are not equipped with emergency medical supplies like medications or oxygen. The ambulances are staffed by physicians that will answer a call with the ambulance then triage and transport to the appropriate hospital. The dispatch operators do not speak English, but instead generally speak Russian. The wait time for an ambulance can be up to one hour. The ambulance staff will not speak English.

#### *HEALTH CLINICS and HOSPITALS (2011)*

##### **Family Medicine Center**

Address: 144A Bokonbaev St.

Tel: (312) 301067

Hours: Monday, Tuesday mornings, 09:00 – 11:00

Thursday afternoon, 13:00 – 16:00

Some American providers work here. It is only for routine-type medical care. No emergency care available. Be aware to arrange an appointment one week prior to going to the center. Payment is not expected but you can leave cash as donation.

**NeoMed: A Private Diagnostic and Consultative Medical Clinic**

Address: 21 Gorky St. (intersection Gorky/Elebaeva)

Tel: (312) 906090

This is a general clinic with a number of specialists. It has a CT scanner and modern ultrasound machines with good diagnostic capabilities. No providers speak English. Take an interpreter if you do not speak Russian.

**National Center of Traumatology and Orthopedics**

Address: 206, Kyrgyz Republicivonosova St.

Admitting department/Tel: (312) 211778

This is a National Center with clinics and hospital wards. It has an emergency department, and it accepts all types of trauma patients including burns. It also has a ward for detox from drugs and alcohol.

**City Trauma Unit**

Address: 41 Manas (intersection Toktogul/Manas)

Reception/Tel: (312) 318922

Provides 24-hour first aid for minor traumas. No inpatient facilities.

**Pediatric Emergency Hospital**

Address: 8a, Baitik Baatyr St.

Admitting department/Tel: (312) 544655

Office/Tel: (312) 562326, 544642

This is a pediatric general hospital in the city and accepts all types of pediatric emergencies.

**National Center of Cardiology and Internal Medicine**

Address: 3 Togolok Moldo St.

ICU department/Tel: (312) 625682

This Center has an ICU and is able to care for patients having heart attacks and other cardiology problems. It has a 24-hour emergency entrance with a physician on duty.

**Infectious Disease Hospital**

Address: 70 Tolstoy St.

ICU department/Tel: (312) 590018

Admitting office/Tel: (312) 590154

This hospital accepts patients with infectious conditions. If one has a fever, this is the hospital that accepts that patient as other hospitals usually do not accept a patient with a fever. There is a limited ICU. For foreigners, a private room on a regular ward is provided. There is a laboratory that can do cultures.

**“Kamek” Private Surgical Clinic**

Surgical department

Address: 225, Moskovskaya St.

Tel: (312) 640055, 640044



Polyclinic address: 45 Aynee St.  
Reception/Tel: (312) 215151  
Clinical Chief office/Tel: (312) 215555

### **National Republican Hospital**

Address: 1 Togolok Moldo St. (intersection of Togolok Moldo and Moskovskaya St.)  
Admitting department/Tel: (312) 620987  
Neurotrauma admitting department/Tel: (312) 620964  
Angio neurology/Tel: (312) 666403  
Microsurgery department: /Tel: (312) 660619  
Eye department#1/Tel: (312) 663256  
Eye department#2/Tel: (312) 621019

This is a very large compound that houses different medical specialties. There are many buildings. When going to this center for any emergency, one must ask where the correct building is for the specific problem. There is a place for Eye, Ear, Nose and Throat emergencies with 24-hour emergency services, an Angio Neurology Center for strokes or aneurysm, and a Neuro Trauma unit for severe head injuries. This hospital also has a good micro vascular department for nerve or tendon injuries in hands or lower extremities. The local ambulance will know where to take people in this compound. This is not a center to go unescorted if you do not speak Russian. You need to have a local person to translate or use the local ambulance.

### **Eye Hospital and Clinic: Private Clinic**

Address: 5 Baytik Baatyr St.  
Tel: (312) 510251, 510781, 510783  
This is a private eye clinic and hospital with ophthalmologists. Eye exams can be done here.

### **DENTAL CLINICS**

#### **Kairos Dental Clinic**

Address: 10 Ryskulov St.  
Tel: (312) 612 02, 612303  
This is a modern, state-of-the-art dental clinic newly opened in 2009. Dentists speak some English and the receptionist speaks English. There is a panoramic dental x-ray machine here.

#### **Estet**

Address: 51 Baytik Baatyr St. at Gorky St.  
Tel: (312) 543884, 900409  
They provide a full range of services, and meet excellent quality standards in infection control, materials, and technique. No English speakers available.

#### **Alef Dental Clinic (specializing in pediatric dental care)**

Address: 40, Ibraimov street  
Tel. 0 (312) 389600, 38960

This clinic has dentists that specialize in children's care and have anesthesiologists available for children.

### *PHARMACIES*

Please be advised that medications purchased in the pharmacy may not be of the same quality as that obtained in the United States. The brand name of the drug you request may not be the same as the brand available. Look for the formula name on your prescription if are searching for a replacement locally. Please be aware the pharmaceuticals come from a variety of countries, including, but not limited to, China, Russia, the United States, and the European Union.

#### **Neman**

Information Desk: (312) 689141, 689144

#### **Central Pharmacy**

Address: 127 Abdrakhmanov (former Sovetskaya) St. at Moskovskaya St.

Tel: (312) 901011, 665500

#### **Prestige**

Address: 95 A Kievskaya St.

Tel: (312) 621462

### *LABORATORIES*

#### **Neo Med:** A Private Diagnostic and Consultative Medical Clinic

Address: 21 Gorky St. (intersection of Gorky/Elebaeva).

Tel: (312) 906090

#### **Human Laboratory**

Address: 21/2 Logvinenko

Reception/Tel: (312) 620102

#### **Bonetsky's Laboratory**

Address: 20 Prospect Mira (main building)

Reception/Tel: (312) 316074, 316333

This lab has the capability to do culture and sensitivities.

### *MRI and CT PRIVATE DIAGNOSTIC CENTERS*

#### **MEDIPOL CT Center**

Address: 37 Abaya St. (at Mederova)

Tel: (312) 544675, 547813

This is a private, free-standing center with a CT machine, MRI machine for outpatient use. The entrance is accessible to wheel chair and stretchers up an incline.

**UNI-T Reactive – Farma Clinic**

Address: 137 Toktogul St.

Tel: (312) 471563 or 471564

This is a private free standing center with an MRI machine and the CT machine. There are wheel chairs and stretchers available.

**MEDICAL EVACUATION COMPANIES**

This is a short list of companies that will do medical evacuations. There are many more and each person will need to check with their own private insurance to see which is appropriate.

**International SOS Assistance**

3600 Horizaon Blvd. Suite 300

Trevose, PA 19053

Tel: 267-716-24 11

[www.internationalsos.com](http://www.internationalsos.com)

Emergency 24-hour Tel: 215-942 8226

Moscow Tel: 007 495 9376477

Almaty Tel: 007 7272 581911

Doctor on Call/Tel: (007) 701 744 1111

**Global Rescue LLC**

115 Broad St.

Boston, MA 02110

24 hr Tel: 617-459-4200

[www.globalrescue.com](http://www.globalrescue.com)

**U.S. Air Ambulance**

5919 Approach Rd.

Sarasota, FL 34238

24 hr Tel: 800-543-3759

[www.USAirambulance.net](http://www.USAirambulance.net)

**Medex Assistance**

PO Box 19056

Baltimore, MD 21284

Tel: 800-537-2029, 410-453-6300

[www.medexassist.com](http://www.medexassist.com)

**Swiss-Air Rescue**

PO Box 1414

CH-8058 Zurich Airport

Tel: +41 44 654 33 11

[www.swiss-air-ambulance.com](http://www.swiss-air-ambulance.com)

**Asia Air Ambulance**

Bangkok, Thailand

Tel: 66-8989-69000

[www.asiaairambulance.com](http://www.asiaairambulance.com)

**Medical Wings Siam Land Flying Co., Ltd.**

Bangkok, Thailand

Tel: 66-2247-3392, 66-2535-4735

[www.medicalwings.com](http://www.medicalwings.com)

**Housing**

Housing can be found through real estate agents; the best-known is “ARC” real estate, Kyrgyz-Concept Project.

Tel: +996-312-906262 (ext.291)

[arc@concept.kg](mailto:arc@concept.kg)

[flats@concept.kg](mailto:flats@concept.kg)

[www.concept.kg](http://www.concept.kg)

Sometimes housing arrangements are made by host institutions or affiliates. Grantees should approach their proposed host institutions to ask for assistance with housing. Fulbright students and scholars currently residing in Kyrgyzstan are a good resource to help new arrivals find housing. PAS is always happy to assist in finding appropriate housing. Apartments for rent are from \$500-\$1,200 per month. They are generally furnished including kitchen utensils, linens, and internet access.

PAS books a hotel or the temporary apartment for two to three nights while grantees find appropriate housing. It is highly appreciated if grantees provide PAS with their final itineraries.

**Communications**

Internet is available with service improving rapidly, but it is priced according to time or downloads, anywhere from \$20-\$70 a month depending on the provider and your subscription plan. ADSL and other broadband services are available and cost \$30-\$120 per month. As with dial-up, prices are based on the amount of data uploaded and downloaded. Prepaid dial-up internet service cards are available for purchase around town and internet cafes are prevalent if you wish to get internet access without a contract. Wi-Fi is accessible in most public places.

**Diplomatic pouch is not accessible for general mail.** The local postal system is usually reliable, although valuable items should be sent by registered mail, and insured if very valuable. To avoid delays with a crucial item or package, it is recommended that DHL or FEDEX be used.

## **Banking and Money**

*Som*, the local currency, is available at exchange offices or banks. Most Fulbrighters prefer to use their American credit and ATM cards to access their funds from American accounts. ATMs are available in Bishkek, though outside the city, it is best to simply travel with your cash. Most vendors DO NOT accept credit cards.

Fulbright grantees have the privilege to cash checks up to \$1,000 per week at the U.S. Embassy in Bishkek.

## **Transportation**

Public transportation is relatively reliable in Bishkek. There are limited bus services and extensive minibus (*marshrutka*) services throughout major cities, but they are usually filled to capacity and often have reckless drivers. The most reliable means of transportation is by taxi, which is also relatively inexpensive.

## **Food**

While outdoor produce bazaars are ubiquitous, there are several Western-style Turkish-owned shopping centers. Beta Stores is the most frequently shopped and these stores have a relatively dependable selection of goods like meats, dairy, fresh-baked items, fruits and vegetables, baby care and food items, pet care and food items, and body care brand names like L'Oreal and Pantene. Most imported goods are Turkish brands and not all brands are reliably available. Prices range from inexpensive to high depending on where you shop and what you are buying. Processed foods and most appliances and clothing are expensive because they are all imported, whereas organic, locally grown foods and handmade crafts are cheap. Meat quality is good. Fish is available mostly imported from Russia. If you are a vegetarian, you will get along fine with the local produce in season. Fruits and vegetables are in plentiful supply when in season; in winter, the supply of fresh fruits and vegetables is limited and expensive. Many grantees bring along favorite spices and baking products as what is locally available is not the same as what can be found in the United States.

## **Weather**

There are four seasons in Bishkek with winter and summer being the longest. Winter is cold and snowy and lasts from December through March. Winter temperatures can dip below zero degrees Fahrenheit. Snow falls every few days with accumulations of 1-4 inches and usually melts in time for the next flurry. Sidewalks tend to have 2-4 inches of ice covering them throughout the

winter. Spring is pleasant and fall tends to be rainy and muddy. Summer is hot, but dry, with temperatures reaching above 100 degrees Fahrenheit. The humidity level remains low throughout the year and is exacerbated during the winter; consider bringing or purchasing 220-v vaporizers or humidifiers and moisturizers for extra-dry skin.

## **Electricity**

Power is 220 volt, 50 cycles. U.S.-manufactured appliances will require transformers to operate. If you plan to bring appliances with you, we strongly encourage that they be 220-volt compatible. Many appliances are available locally but prices are higher and reliability can be suspect.

Intermittent power outages during the summer months are common in Bishkek due to the decaying infrastructure and the Kyrgyz government's attempt to conserve power for the winter months. Grantees are recommended to bring flashlights and rechargeable batteries, and to have candles on hand.

## **SECURITY**

While most Fulbrighters complete their time in the Kyrgyz Republic without incident, the U.S. Embassy in Bishkek continues to observe heightened security precautions. Extremist groups such as the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) and the Islamic Jihad Union (IJU), terrorist organizations with links to Al Qaeda, may be planning terrorist acts targeting Americans or American interests in the Central Asia region. The IJU has become increasingly active in Central Asia. When travelling to the south of the country, it is crucial that grantees maintain their contact with PAS. If you travel outside of your grant site it is much appreciated if you inform PAS staff.

Both economic and violent crimes are increasing in the Kyrgyz Republic. Street crimes such as muggings, physical assaults and pick pocketing are common due to high unemployment. Embassy Bishkek recommends that grantees not walk alone after dark anywhere, should avoid being out late at night, and remain in a group whenever possible. Police assistance, in most cases, is minimal. Uniformed and plain-clothes militia patrol areas near the Western-style hotels and other tourist attractions where they have been known to challenge foreigners and demand money from them.

The most recent public announcement on travel in the Kyrgyz Republic can be found on the Department of State website at <http://travel.state.gov> or Embassy Bishkek's public website <http://bishkek.usembassy.gov>.

## **GENERAL INFORMATION ON THE KYRGYZ REPUBLIC**

*Special thanks to Peace Corps Kyrgyz Republic for its contribution to the text and resource list below.*

The Kyrgyz Republic is a beautiful, mountainous country in Central Asia that is bordered by Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and China. There is little contemporary documented history about the Kyrgyz people and their land, as the Soviets “Russified” the indigenous ethnic groups and cultures across the Soviet Union. The Kyrgyz people are traditional nomadic herders who have often been subjected to the influences of foreign rulers and cultures due to their strategic location on the Silk Road.

Part of the Soviet Union for most of the 20th century, the Kyrgyz Republic declared its independence on August 31, 1991. Today, the country is a vibrant mix of Kyrgyz, Uzbek, Russian, and other traditional influences struggling for vitality.

### **Economy**

Traditionally, Kyrgyz people were largely nomadic shepherds and traders. The Soviet period led to the establishment of collective agriculture; 200 collective farms operated in the Kyrgyz Republic prior to independence. Today, agriculture accounts for 40% of the country’s economic output, and major agricultural products include wheat, meat (mostly mutton, beef, and horse), wool, leather, potatoes, cotton, sugar beets, poppy seeds, tobacco, apples, and medicinal plants.

Trade is still a vital industry with east-west routes that date back hundreds of years. Today, China, Kazakhstan, Turkey, and Russia are major trading partners. Thousands of small merchants buy and sell at the country’s numerous bazaars. Remittances from about 800,000 citizens of Kyrgyzstan living abroad represent 40% of the country’s GDP.

Mining is another major industry. Shipments of gold accounted for 75% of export revenues in January – August 2010. While the country is rich in water resources, the Kyrgyz Republic has very little oil or natural gas, and relies on its neighbors for these essentials.

Economic reforms have resulted in several milestones: World Bank membership and Most-Favored-Nation trading status with the United States in 1992, introduction of non-Soviet currency in 1993, observer status in the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade in 1993, becoming the first Central Asian country to receive International Monetary Fund funding in 1993, Asian Development Bank membership in 1994, and World Trade Organization membership in 1998.

### **Government**

At the same time the Kyrgyz Republic struggles economically, it is an evolving democracy. The first president, Askar Akayev, was re-elected to five-year terms three times before being chased

out of office in March 2005. His elected successor, Kurmanbek Bakiyev, was thrown out in a violent uprising just eight months after being re-elected to office by a wide majority in July 2009. In both cases, popular disgust with corruption at the highest levels led to the presidents' downfall.

The people believe in democratic principles and flock to the polls on election days. A new constitution was drafted and ratified by 90% of the voters in June 2010. Parliamentary elections in October led to the formation of dozens of political parties. In the end, only five parties received enough votes to take seats in the new parliament. Three parties successfully formed a coalition in December 2010, putting the Prime Minister and Speaker in place. Then-President Roza Otunbayeva declared that she would not run for election to the presidency at the next elections in 2011. Her example in December 2011 of a peaceful transfer of power to the new president, Almazbek Atambayev, was the first in the region.

## **People and Culture**

The Kyrgyz think of themselves as the poets and artists of Central Asia. Nothing illustrates this spirit more than the *Epic of Manas*, the longest narrative poem in the world. Manas is a hero who, according to legend, unified tribal leaders long ago in the mountains and valleys now known as the Kyrgyz Republic.

About 5.5 million people live in the Kyrgyz Republic, mostly inhabiting the fertile foothills and plains north of the Tien Shan Mountains. A quarter of the population lives in Bishkek, the capital. The country of Manas is now home to more than 80 ethnic groups from all over Asia and Eastern Europe. While the people are predominantly Kyrgyz, a significant number of Uzbeks live in the south of the country and many Russians live in the north. Kyrgyz is the national language, but both Kyrgyz and Russian are used by the government.

While most Kyrgyz people are Muslim, Islam has a different, and perhaps milder, influence than in many other Muslim-majority countries. In the north, many people of Russian and European descent are Russian Orthodox Christians, but this religion plays a minor role in the country's culture.

The Kyrgyz people are known for their felt and ceramic crafts and for their Silk Road-related history. Soviet culture fostered opera and ballet groups, theaters, and museums. Ancient tribal affiliations still govern social norms in many parts of the south, where you find more of a mix of western and traditional Uzbek and Kyrgyz cultures. Aging, Soviet-style towns define the north. Most people in Bishkek wear Western-style clothes and fret about the same things Americans do: Jobs (or the lack thereof), the price of gasoline, and pothole-covered roads. Yet in both rural and urban areas, Kyrgyz social life centers on the family.



## Environment

The country's rugged, snowcapped mountains define its landscape and weather. It is cold in the winter, and there is usually snow in the northern plains and in the mountains to the south from December to February. The south is more temperate, and wild tulips bloom when mountain runoff and spring rains irrigate the land. Summers can be dusty.

This striking terrain provides many opportunities to enjoy the outdoors, including white-water rafting, fishing, camping, horseback riding, hiking, winter skiing, hot springs, glaciers, mountain climbing (two peaks are higher than 21,000 feet), and visits to historic Silk Road sites.

## Resources for Further Information

### **[www.state.gov](http://www.state.gov) and [travel.state.gov](http://travel.state.gov)**

The Department of State issues background notes about countries around the world. Find Kyrgyzstan and learn more about its social and political history. You can also go to the site's international travel section to check on conditions that may affect your safety.

### **[bishkek.usembassy.gov](http://bishkek.usembassy.gov)**

The U.S. Embassy Bishkek posts information about current projects and upcoming events. Stay on top of things through the Embassy's Facebook page.

### **[www.kgembassy.org](http://www.kgembassy.org)**

The Embassy of the Kyrgyz Republic in the United States.

### **[www.24.kg](http://www.24.kg)**

The News Agency 24.kg is a mass media market project for Kyrgyzstan that provides a wide spectrum of informational services to state, corporate, and private structures.

### **[www.akipress.com/\\_en\\_index.php](http://www.akipress.com/_en_index.php)**

Local news agency website.

### **[eng.president.kg](http://eng.president.kg)**

Official site of the President of the Kyrgyz Republic.

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